Wainscot Walls
By Rick Chaffey

A great decorating feature to dress up a wall is to apply wainscot. Wainscot is available in several styles including traditional bead board, Pickwick, V groove or panel and comes in sheet form hardboard and MDF panels or strips, as well as pine, poplar and several other lumber species.

Panels or strips, which are available in various sizes and thickness, are easiest to handle and install for the **diy** application while the grid style inset or raised panels offer a more challenging endeavour. What ever the choice, the basics for installation will apply.

To install sheet or strip wainscot, begin by making sure the wall is clean and any existing moulding such as baseboard or chair rail is removed. If there is any casing around doors or windows it is better to leave those in place and butt the wainscot up to them. Next, determine the height you need the wainscot to be and mark a level line along the wall. If you are using the wainscot as part of a chair rail system that height will be 32" (up to 36" for high back chairs). In kitchens, pantries and laundry rooms the suggested normal height is 5'. After marking the height, find the centre of the wall and work out from the centre (the same method used for hanging wallpaper). This will ensure that both ends will be equal if a partial sheet or strip is required. Make sure you have a level on hand so that the first pieces are plumb both horizontally and vertically. Check every few pieces to verify they are still going on straight.

In most instances you will be installing your wainscot right over the gyprock wall so it can be applied using a construction adhesive or if you can locate the studs, it can be nailed using a brad nailer. One other consideration may be the last piece on each end as they may have to be scribed to make a perfect fit if the walls are not truly plumb.

After installing your product and before you re-apply any moulding which may have been removed, prime and paint the wainscot. A top cap or a piece of chair rail can then be applied to the top edge to complete your installation.

Raised or inset panel wainscot requires a little more planning but essentially follows the same format. I recommend drawing the layout right onto the wall surface which gives you a good visual of how the product will look when it is completed. This method also allows you to make adjustments before you cut any material. Once you are satisfied with the layout you can begin to install your grids. The grid work is composed of rails and stiles *(see diagram)* which excluding the top rail and bottom rail, are a uniform size usually about 3" in width.

Starting from the centre of the wall, measure the distance to the end and divide that by the width of the panel frame you have decided upon. Depending on the width you have chosen you may end up with a different size panel on the ends but by starting in the centre this will ensure that the last panels are same size on both ends. Applying the rails and stiles is the first task. As with the panel or strip style it is important to use your level and a square when attaching these components. Keeping these pieces square will ensure tight joints where the rail and stile meet and for the 45° cut on the panel mould if you like that style and use those mouldings *(see diagram)*.

       After the rails and stiles have been installed you can then install any panel mould, a top cap and your base board and then you are ready for finishing and paint. This style of

wainscoting will dramatically improve the look of any room. As with any project you tackle, taking time to plan and layout your project will pay big dividends in the finished results. I like to draw diagrams to show me where things will be but also to help others who will benefit from the project, visualize what you are doing and if changes need to be made it will be much easier here than once you have installed any material.
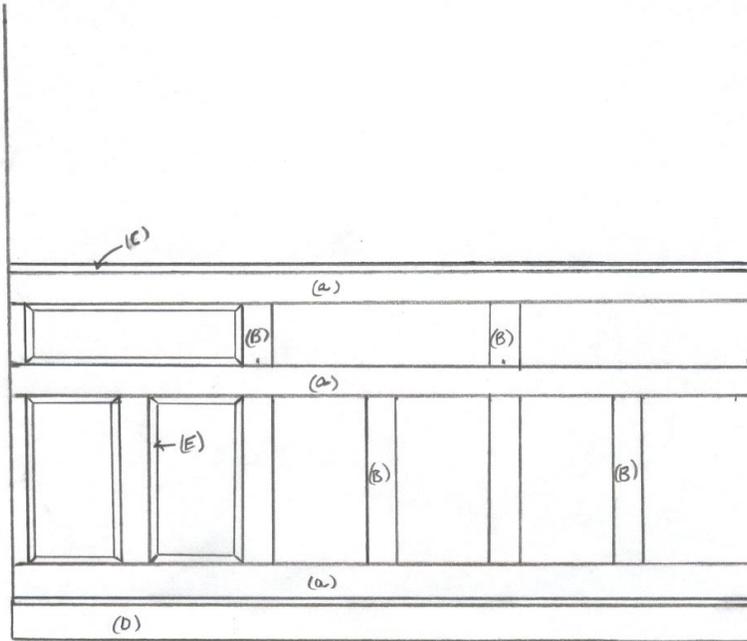
(a) - Rail
(b) - Stile
(c) - Top Cap
(d) - Base Board
(E) - Panel Mould